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Tam. Africa

Congo

Memorandum

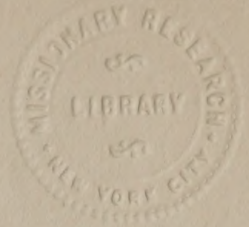
TO HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT FROM
THE CONGO REFORM ASSOCIATION
ON THE REPORTS OF HIS MAJESTY'S
CONSULAR STAFF IN THE CONGO
AS PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT,
NOVEMBER, 1911.

:: *Compiled on behalf of the* ::
CONGO REFORM ASSOCIATION
By E. D. MOREL, Hon. Secretary.

DECEMBER, 1911.

ISSUED BY THE
CONGO REFORM ASSOCIATION,
GRANVILLE HOUSE ARUNDEL STREET, STRAND, W.C.

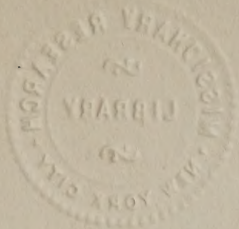
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To the Right Hon. Sir EDWARD GREY, Bart., P.C., M.P.,
His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,
FOREIGN OFFICE, LONDON.

December 5th, 1911.

Sir,

I am directed by the Congo Reform Association to acknowledge the receipt of the Secretary of State's letter of November 23rd, from which the Association is glad to note that the points mentioned in my communication of November 13th will be borne in mind when the time comes to consider the question of the British recognition of the annexation of the Congo by Belgium.

I am to state that the Association has observed with much satisfaction from the recent declaration of the Secretary of State in Parliament, that His Majesty's Government are not prepared to consider that question until the whole of the Congo has been released in law from the LEOPOLDIAN system, *i.e.*, until July, 1912.

In the view of the Association the Consular Reports now issued by His Majesty's Government, while they happily confirm the existence of improved conditions of the reformed areas, accentuate in the gravest manner many of the fears as to the future which the Association has from time to time expressed.

I have the honour, on behalf of the Association, to attach a Memorandum dealing in considerable detail with the various matters discussed in the Consular Reports, and I am desirous to express the hope that His Majesty's Government will give these representations the attention which, it is submitted, the importance of the subject-matter warrants.

Apart from the general analysis of Belgian rule in the Congo according to the Consular Reports (which are discussed in the attached Memorandum), the Association desires me in this communication to lay stress upon two matters which it regards as of capital importance.

The first refers to the maintenance of forced labour—or, more accurately, as Consul ARMSTRONG describes it, “slavery”—imposed by the Belgian Government in the “unreformed” regions of the Congo, in order to raise revenue.

The second refers to the recent utterances of the Belgian Colonial Minister transmitted by Sir FRANCIS VILLIERS.

As to the first matter, the Association deems itself justified in protesting with the utmost vigour against the truly abominable conditions revealed by Consul ARMSTRONG in the "unreformed" regions of the Congo. That the perpetuation of the old system would necessarily be accompanied by the continuance of many of the abuses, which for the past eight years Consul after Consul has reinforced the Association in declaring inseparable from its maintenance, the Association has repeatedly stated; and all its representations to His Majesty's Government in 1907 and 1908 were directed at preventing the system of slavery upheld by King Leopold being reproduced under the Belgian flag. But the protestations of the Belgian Government have been so precise, the belief expressed in them by His Majesty's Government so emphatic, that the Congo Reform Association was not altogether prepared for the picture of systematic wrong-doing, even in the "unreformed" regions, revealed by Consul ARMSTRONG. The Association is not without appreciation of the fact that His Majesty's Government have now published Consul ARMSTRONG's report, but it may, perhaps, be excused for remarking that it does not yet understand why His Majesty's Government should have thought necessary to have withheld that report for ten months.

Setting this aside, the Association would consider it a grave reflection upon British policy that a state of affairs such as that disclosed by Consul ARMSTRONG should be passively acquiesced in by His Majesty's Government for another eight months. The excuse—an excuse containing, in the Association's view, no shadow of validity—put forward by the Belgian Government for so gross an infringement of its duties as a civilised Power in Africa, is deprived by the recent judicial decision in the matter of the "Crown Domain" moneys, of all *raison d'être*. The Belgian Government now has at its disposal a sum of £2,000,000; more than ten times sufficient to replace the revenue which would be lost by an immediate cessation of this system of slavery in the "unreformed" regions (and also to lower the onerous incidence of taxation in the "reformed" regions). For the Belgian Government, under these circumstances, to persist in such wrong-doing for the best part of another year, would be to exceed in scandalous disregard of civilised obligations and duties all previous performances of the Congo.

As to the second matter, the Association directs me to draw pointed attention to the closing words of the last Despatch printed in the White Book—the Despatch dated October 27th last from Sir FRANCIS VILLIERS, the new British Minister at Brussels. Referring to a conversation held on March 8th last between Sir ARTHUR HARDINGE, His Majesty's late Minister at Brussels, and M. RENKIN, the Belgian Colonial Minister, Sir FRANCIS VILLIERS transmits to His Majesty's Government the Belgian Colonial Minister's views of the significance properly attaching to that conversation. It was regarded by the Belgian Colonial Minister, Sir FRANCIS VILLIERS

states, as quite "unofficial," since the matter discussed (*i.e.*, Consul ARMSTRONG Report) "was one which exclusively concerned the internal administration of a Belgian Colony."

To this pretension, *viz.*, that the affairs of the Congo State are a matter of exclusive Belgian concern, the Association takes the strongest possible exception, and ventures to believe that His Majesty's Government will not have failed to have pointed out to the new British Minister at Brussels that it is a pretension which His Majesty's Government can in no way recognise.

The subject is, in the view of the Association, of such paramount importance that I make bold to recall the correspondence in connection with similar pretensions on the part of the Belgian Colonial Minister, which has passed between His Majesty's Government and the Congo Reform Association, especially in April and May of last year.¹

The Association is strongly of opinion that this persistency on the part of the Belgian Government in denying the right of other Powers signatory to the Berlin Act to criticise, and if necessary to intervene, in the affairs of the Congo State so long as the administration of the Congo State continues to be conducted in a manner contrary to the terms of that Act, calls for a clear and explicit repudiation on the part of His Majesty's Government. M. RENKIN's reiterated declaration challenges, in effect, the position of His Majesty's Government under Treaty, and were that challenge allowed to pass unnoticed, public misapprehension as to the rights and obligations of this country could not fail, it is submitted, to arise both at home and abroad.

The Association ventures to hope that in addition to instructions which may have been transmitted to His Majesty's Minister at Brussels on the subject, His Majesty's Government may also find it possible to reassure the public mind in this country on the point.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

E. D. MOREL,

Hon. Secretary.

¹ *a* (From the Congo Reform Association, April 10, 1910.)

b (From the Foreign Office, May 10, 1910.)

c (From the Congo Reform Association, May 12, 1910.)

Memorandum on the Reports of His Majesty's
Consular Staff on the Congo, 1910-1911
(Africa No. 2, 1911).

The observations I am desired to submit to His Majesty's Government in connection with the Consular Reports now issued will be found to be divided into Sections as follows :—

SECTION I.—Present conditions of the Natives in the Areas where the Reform Decrees have been applied.

SECTION II.—Present condition of the Natives in the Areas where the Reform Decrees have not been applied.

SECTION III.—The Future Outlook.

SECTION III. will be found to be sub-divided as follows :—

- (a) The Permanence of Reform.
- (b) The Prospects of Trade Development.
- (c) The Government Rubber Plantations : Forced labour for works of " Public Utility " : The Native Army.

PREFATORY REMARKS.

A majority in the Belgian Chamber of 29 in a House of 166 Members (of whom only 83, or one-half, voted in favour) decided in August, 1908, to annex the Congo State on terms ensuring for further long periods a continuation of the abuses and illegalities of the old system.

The Belgian Annexation and the policy of the Congo Reform Association. The Congo Reform Association had from the first supported the policy of a Belgian annexation as the most practicable means of suppressing the evils prevailing in the Congo State.

But only on the understanding that annexation should *coincide* with the radical suppression of the operative causes of these admitted evils, the operative causes being :—

- (a)—The claim of the Congo State Government to the negotiable wealth of the land, thus depriving the native population of all right to collect the natural products of the soil and to dispose of them in trade.
- (b)—The compulsion exercised by the Congo State Government upon the native population to force the latter to collect these natural products as a “tax,” from the proceeds of which the Congo State Government obtained its revenue.

The above system of rule imposed by the Congo State had been repeatedly denounced by the Unionist and Liberal Governments of Great Britain as “slavery,” so far as its effects upon the native population were concerned, and as a violation of the commercial clauses of the Berlin Act so far as its effects upon Afro-European trade in the Congo were concerned.

Consequently the Association considered that the *prima facie* requirement of any scheme of annexation of the Congo by Belgium was the extraction of binding guarantees from the Belgian Government that this system of slavery and illegality would be abrogated *concurrently with annexation*. This view was held by an influential section of the party in Belgium which desired annexation, but an annexation of the same character as that urged by the Association.

The Association has seen no cause to alter its view that annexation of this character could have been secured—to the great good both of the Congo and of Belgium—had His Majesty's Government adhered to the position they took up in November, 1906, and on February 26, 1908 ; and the Association has not had occasion to regret that it pressed that view steadily upon His Majesty's Government for two years.

After the annexation vote in August, 1908, the old system remained in force all over the Congo under the Belgian flag until July 1, 1910, when by the Reform Scheme of November, 1909, subsequently confirmed by the Royal Decree of March 22, 1910, the system was abolished (with reservations)¹ by law in one section of the territory. In July, 1911, it was abolished (with reservations)¹ by law in another section of the territory. It is still in force in certain regions, *i.e.*, *three years after annexation the Belgian Government is still obtaining revenue by slavery and illegality in a portion of the Congo State territory.*

1 See Section III A., paragraphs X. and XI.

SECTION I.

Present condition of the Natives in the Areas where the Reform Decrees have been applied.

I. The conditions prevailing in the portions of the territory where the old system is, by law, abolished (with reservations)¹ are discussed in despatches from Vice-Consul THURSTAN August 25, 1910), Acting-Consul CAMPBELL (October 25, 1910), Vice-Consul THURSTAN (December 31, 1910) Consul MACKIE (May 30, June 2, June 26, 1911). These reports indicate a marked improvement in former conditions, which, indeed, was bound to follow from the abolition of the old system.

The Association notes with satisfaction the beginning of methods approximating to civilised rule.² It regrets to be unable to describe its satisfaction as unreserved, in view of several causes giving rise to anxiety for the future as indicated in Section III. of this Memorandum.

Apart from these general causes inviting justifiable apprehension, the Association desires to call attention to three points mentioned by the Consular Staff as involving maladministration and hardship, viz.:

- (a)—The retention in the service of the Belgian Government of officials compromised by the old system.
- (b)—The retention in positions of authority over native communities of upstarts (sometimes ex-soldiers) invested with no hereditary claim to the Chieftainship.
- (c)—The difficulty which natives experience in certain districts to pay their taxes in silver coin, owing to the absence or insufficiency of that medium.

The Taxes in Silver Coin.

II. The latter point is referred to in Section III. in connection with trade development; but it may be here remarked that a direct tax in silver coinage levied upon a primitive people may in certain circumstances prove as great, indeed a greater, hardship than a *definitely regulated* tax in produce. Under the new system, practically every adult male is assessed at an annual tax which varies from four-and-twopence to ten shillings—payable in coin. In the first place the average mean of this taxation is very much higher than that prevailing in

¹ See Section IIIA. Paragraphs X & XI.

² See Section IIIA. Paragraph IX.

other tropical African dependencies, expressed in terms of actual cash. When the impoverishment and exhaustion of the Congo—constantly accentuated by the British Consular Staff—is taken into account, the ratio of taxation is enormously higher than that prevailing in other tropical dependencies. Moreover, the Consuls bear witness all through these reports to the difficulty experienced by the natives inhabiting the remoter districts in obtaining silver coinage at all.¹ To demand of a native community that possesses no markets in which to dispose of its saleable commodities, or which possesses no saleable commodities to dispose of even if it had markets (and both cases are cited by the Consuls), and which is unable, therefore, to obtain silver tokens in the ordinary process of trade, is tantamount to forcing that native community into slavery or driving it into armed rebellion. The imposition of a direct tax in silver coin upon a primitive people is, in principle, only justifiable where that people is in a position to acquire it through the medium of commercial transactions, and of the immense majority of the natives of the Congo it may be truly said that they are not yet in that position.

The incidence of the Tax. III. Eliminating the population of the unreformed region (in order not to confuse the argument now advanced), as given in CONSUL CAMPBELL's tables,² the total estimated population of the reformed region of the Congo is reckoned at just over six millions—men, women and children. In another table the total estimated *taxable* population of the *whole* Congo is given at 2,007,087, or 1,671,809, deducting the taxable population of the unreformed regions.³ But this taxable population includes men and women, women, as a foot-note indicates, being no longer taxable. Hence at the very outside estimate, the taxable population of the reformed regions of the Congo (*i.e.*, the regions where a tax in silver coin is imposed) is to-day half that total, *viz.*, 835,904, or, in round numbers, 840,000. Now the Belgian Government reckons to obtain from these supposititious 840,000 male adults next year in taxes, no less than 7,150,000 francs paid in silver coin.⁴ In other words, even on this basis of calculation, which is largely favourable to the Belgian Government, the incidence of taxation works out at the rate of over 8 francs per head imposed upon an exhausted and impoverished people. A tax in silver, even unjustifiably heavy, is so immeasurably an improvement over an unregulated so-called "tax" in produce, which involved the tax-payer in continuous labour all the year, that the change may well have come as a comparative blessing. But one may safely predict that the present excessive incidence will, if maintained, prove to be an intolerable burden. It may be reiterated that nowhere in Africa are primitive communities of forest-dwellers taxed so heavily by their European overlords.

¹ Confirmed to the Association by the American Missionaries in the Kasai!

² pp. 16 and 17 of the White Book.

³ Numbering 335,278 (White Book).

⁴ *Vide* Budget des recettes et des dépenses du Congo belge, pour l'exercice (p. 57).

SECTION II.

Present Condition of the Natives in the Areas where the Reform Decrees have not been applied.

Continued Abuses. IV. The state of affairs in the unopened regions is extremely grave and unhappily bears out the predictions of the Association as to the situation which could not fail to persist if the Belgian Government were permitted to annex the Congo on the basis of the old system.

Consul ARMSTRONG's report is, indeed, very nearly as bad as any intelligence which has been received from the Congo, even in the worst days of the old *régime*. It conveys the clearest proof that the Belgian Government is maintaining in the unreformed regions, the same atrociously cruel and destructive form of slavery which has been responsible for the depopulation and economic exhaustion of the past twenty years.

Staggering Depopulation. V. The extent of that depopulation is now rendered evident for the first time officially. It can only be described as appalling.

That STANLEY's original estimate of the population of the Congo at forty-three millions, made a quarter of a century ago, was exaggerated is doubtless true. But at the time of the annexation of the Congo by Belgium, the Belgian Government asserted that the population was anything between thirty and twenty millions. Consul CAMPBELL now produces information gathered from local official sources which gives the estimated total population at only 7,248,000 !

The following table possesses an eloquence which needs no emphasising :—

British Dependencies in } ¹	Total area in square miles,	Total population,
Tropical Africa }	928,535	26,026,790
German Dependencies in } ²		
Tropical Africa }	574,209	12,000,000
The Congo State }	900,000	7,248,303

The "unreformed" areas are the only ones in the Congo to which to-day the terms "densely populated" can apply. They contain more than one-seventh of the entire remaining population.³ *Yet it is these very regions which the*

¹ Nyassaland, Uganda, British East Africa, Northern Nigeria, Southern Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Gambia.

² German East Africa and Cameroons, (excluding Territory recently acquired from France).

³ 1,189,000 (p. 17). (White Book).

Belgian Government has been subjecting since the annexation in August, 1908, to the process of systematic bleeding (which has resulted in such disaster to the other parts of this unhappy territory) until they, too, will be reduced to the same condition of physical and economic exhaustion, as plainly foreshadowed by Consuls Armstrong and Campbell.

VI. We feel that we cannot adequately comment upon the crushing indictment contained in Consul ARMSTRONG's report, confirmed as it is in a general way by Consul-General MACKIE.¹ That such a state of affairs—"a direct system of slavery created and maintained by the Government," as Consul ARMSTRONG puts it—should still prevail in a region of Africa, for the welfare of whose inhabitants the civilised Powers undertook solemn responsibilities, is the bitterest satire upon the morality of Governments. That it should be enforced by the Power which, boasting of its wealth and industry, declared when it annexed the Congo that one of its "loftiest preoccupations" was the fulfilment of the "civilising mission" it had undertaken,² will, the Association feels, bring its own inevitable punishment.

The Belgian Government's illegal traffic in arms and the International dangers arising therefrom.

There is, however, one aspect of the Belgian Government's misrule in the unreformed regions as to which, it would seem, the direct interest of His Majesty's Government can be appealed to, apart from obligations of honour involved in His Majesty's Government's frequent admissions of responsibility towards the native races of the Congo. It is one that the Association has frequently referred to and which has formed the subject of questions in the House of Commons influenced by the Association. We refer to the traffic in arms carried on by the Belgian Government in order to procure ivory and rubber for purposes of revenue, in defiance of International Conventions.

This charge is now brought with all the weight properly attaching to a Report of one of His Majesty's Consuls, for the accuracy of which His Majesty's Government, in publishing it, assumes responsibility. Consul ARMSTRONG, we observe, declares that the sale of arms and ammunition by the Belgian Government has reached in the Uele district "the most alarming proportions." The greater part of these arms, he says, "have been given in exchange for ivory." The violation of the Arms and Ammunition Conference is complete. "Nearly all the freemen in every village have guns." "Chiefs have as many as 150." They all appear to possess "unlimited quantities of powder and caps." The fatuity of the proceeding even from the point of view of the Belgian Government's own ultimate interest is shown by the fact that "in order to counteract the effect of

¹ p 54 of the White Book.

² Memorandum to His Majesty's Government, April 25th, 1908.

distributing large quantities of arms and ammunition, a force of considerably over 1,000 troops is distributed over the Uele district." The situation is thus summarised by Consul ARMSTRONG:

"And while this matter would be solely the business of the Government were there no other colonies touching on the borders of the Uele district, in effect a great deal of trade in guns and ammunition is actually carried on between the Congo and the neighbouring colonies. That this state of affairs is highly dangerous is manifest. The relations between the Congo Government and some of its chiefs on the north of the Uele River are almost hostile. And everything points to an uprising in the near future. I have pointed this out elsewhere in this report showing that such a situation has arisen as the result of investing chiefs with despotic rights over the people in order to enforce rubber and other taxes. And these chiefs being obliged to resort to the most abusive means in order to enforce the payment of taxes are given numbers of guns to protect themselves against the vengeance of their people. At regular intervals therefore they have been obliged to listen to the demands of their people, and thus defy the Government. This state of affairs has been going on for years. Chiefs who are the Government's friends to-day are its enemies to-morrow. To supply them with guns and ammunition therefore is to invite them to revolt whenever the occasion presents itself. There is scarcely a chief in the Uele district who has not at some time or other been forced into this situation. Punitive expeditions have been sent against them, which have resulted in the reinstatement of the chiefs and the re-establishment of the rubber tax. This state of affairs can be seen in almost all its evolutionary stages at the present time, and would therefore appear to be almost a direct line of policy."

A more disgraceful state of affairs it would be difficult to imagine.

VII. The Association cannot but record its surprise that in the Despatch addressed to Sir A. HARDINGE by the Secretary of State on March 3, 1911, commenting upon Consul ARMSTRONG's Report, as in the reported conversation between the Belgian Colonial Minister and Sir A. HARDINGE following upon that Despatch, no mention appears to have been made of this traffic in arms on the part of the Belgian Government, described by Consul ARMSTRONG as "a positive menace to the tranquillity, not only of the Belgian Colony, but also of the neighbouring Colonies."

SECTION III.

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK.

A.—The Permanence of Reform.

VIII. In presenting to the Government its observations on the future outlook, the Association desires to base itself solely upon what are admitted facts, and to confine itself more particularly to such of these admitted facts as possess capital importance in determining the problem of the future of Belgian Rule on the Congo.

Satisfactory features in the Budgetary Estimates for 1912. The fact most pregnant of promise is to be sought, in the Association's view, rather in the budgetary estimates for 1912 than in the pages of the White Book. The salient points in the Belgian Parliamentary Paper (No. 5) giving the estimated revenue and expenditure returns for 1912, are as follows :

Estimated receipts	.....	.....	.....	.....	£1,814,705.
Estimated ordinary expenditure	.....	.....	.....	.....	£1,988,812.
Estimated extraordinary expenditure	.....	.....	.....	.....	£672,746.

These figures show an estimated loss for the year's working of £174,107 and an estimated sum of £672,746 to be, in part, invested by Belgium in the Congo in the shape of capital expenditure next year. The significance of the figures lies in this, that, as a consequence of the reforms already introduced and foreshadowed, and of the general change in governing ideas, Belgium will be spending next year in connection with the Congo the sum of £846,853. That any attempt to retrieve the Congo from the morass of misery and economic ruin into which the Leopoldian System had plunged it, would of necessity involve its new governors in heavy expenditure, of which the present sum can in the nature of the case only be a very small instalment, was, of course, obvious. It is also unhappily true that the greater part of the "extraordinary" expenses are not devoted to objects calculated to relieve the native population of the Congo of the burden of taxation resting upon it. On this point indeed many reserves would require to be made. Nevertheless the Association feels that this first proof that Belgium has realised the truth that the Congo can no longer be treated as a milch-cow is so important as to warrant the Association in laying great stress upon it.

A feature in the revenue estimates is the estimated fall in the revenues derived from the rubber and ivory "taxes" of £298,976. This fall is to a certain extent counterbalanced by the increased receipts under taxes in silver coin. Some of the injustices the latter involve, as at present imposed, and the dangers to be apprehended from their continuance at the present ratio of incidence, has already been touched upon.¹

Satisfactory features in the Consular Reports.

IX.—Accompanied as they are by sundry warnings and grave criticism, the Consuls' reports in so far as they deal with the reformed areas are encouraging, and the opinions of a number of missionaries therein quoted the Association rejoices to note. There can be no doubt that the *present* situation in the reformed areas is altogether different from what it was, and the Association is the less likely to wish to minimise these improvements, since it is able with some justice to claim that its own labours have not been foreign to securing them. But the word "present" needs to be accentuated because when, turning from a contemplation of the present as compared with the dreadful past, the Consuls look into the future, they hardly make a pretence of concealing their anxiety. This anxiety the Association shares, and the main causes of it will now be indicated.

Unsatisfactory character of the Decree restoring to the Natives the right to trade.

X.—In numerous preceding communications, and again in the action taken by the Executive Committee of the Congo Reform Association on November 7 (duly communicated to His Majesty's Government and acknowledged by them),² the Association has emphasised the unsatisfactory character of the Royal Decree of March, 1910, in so far as it appeared by its very wording to cast doubt upon the permanence of the capital reform therein announced—and since applied in the 1910 and 1911 areas—*i.e.*, the restoration to the native population of its right to collect the natural products of the soil and dispose of them in trade. The Association believes it can assert without fear of contradiction that His Majesty's Government fully share its view as to the paramount importance of this reform. Indeed, it is safe to say that there is an absolute consensus of opinion on the subject in all quarters. No change in the conditions of the Congo can be lasting which does not guarantee to the native population *for all time* its right to buy and to sell. And it is here precisely that the Reform Decrees give rise to serious doubts as to the Belgian Government's intentions.

¹ *Vide* Section I. Paragraph III.

² Letter from the Congo Reform Association to the Foreign Office, Nov. 13, 1911; acknowledged Nov. 23, 1911.

Uncertain
position of
the Natives.

XI. In allowing it to be inferred that a return to the *status quo ante* is possible, that this restoration of an elementary human right to the native population is not the acknowledgment in equity and law of such right, but merely a revocable concession, the Belgian Government at once invites and compels suspicion. That suspicion can only be intensified by the circumstance that, concurrently, the Belgian Government has taken no legislative step calculated to modify the old Leopoldian conception of land, which, without in anyway defining the word "State," declared—to quote the words used by His Majesty's Government—"all lands State property regardless of native rights."¹ On this particular point the Association can add nothing to the document it presented to His Majesty's Government at the close of 1908, in acknowledging which the Foreign Secretary was good enough to say that "the exhaustive and closely-reasoned memorandum enclosed will be of great assistance to His Majesty's Government in their efforts to secure the restoration to the natives of their rights." If the restoration to the natives of their rights to deal freely in the *produce of the land* were made absolute, the absence of legislation recognising native communal rights in *the land itself*, might well be left unpressed, since, in a practical sense, the question would be solved thereby. But so long as any doubt remains as to the permanent character of this restoration, the absence of legislation recognising native tenure assumes extreme significance. *The Association most earnestly appeals to His Majesty's Government not to leave this question in the state it now is.* No assurances from Belgium, however eloquent, are worth the paper upon which they are written if the guarantee of permanence to this restoration of native right in the free collection and disposal of natural products is lacking. The gravity of the question is strikingly illustrated in the Consuls' reports, in numerous passages which bear directly or indirectly upon it. We find Consul CAMPBELL drawing attention to the absence of recognition of native rights in the land² and to the power invested in the Governor-General to suspend the right of collecting its products.³ Elsewhere the Consul openly foreshadows the possibilities of a return "to the old *régime*."⁴ Consul ARMSTRONG, in pointing "to the fact that the Government intends to make free trade as difficult as possible," conveys a similar warning.⁵ Consul MACKIE describes rightly, and in accordance with the Decree of March, 1910, the present enjoyment on the part of the natives of gathering produce for trade as "still a simple sufferance."⁶ "A reversion to the old system" is discussed as a possibility in the same report.⁷

¹ Memorandum annexed to Despatch, November 4, 1908.

² p. 2. of the White Book.

³ pp. 4 and 5. of the White Book.

⁴ p. 12. of the White Book.

⁵ p. 26. of the White Book.

⁶ p. 53. of the White Book.

⁷ p. 86. of the White Book.

B.—The Prospects of Trade Development.

The
Connection
between
Native
Rights
and
European
Commerce.

XII. Intimately bound up with the question of this inherent right of the native to trade, *i.e.*, to indulge in commercial activity, which lies at the root of human freedom, is the question whether the native is or is not to have *the opportunity of putting that right into actual practice.* He can only exercise it if he is supplied with markets. He can only be supplied with markets so far as his trade relations with the outer world are concerned, through the European merchant. The problem on its European side is, therefore, intimately bound up with its African side. The two, indeed, cannot be separated. The European Governments are by Treaty empowered to secure for their nationals, liberty to trade with the native peoples of the Congo. But this liberty becomes inoperative in practice if the native peoples of the Congo are not free to collect and dispose of their produce in trade with Europeans. Consequently the first condition the European Governments are required to ensure is that the natives of the Congo shall be recognised as possessing the incontestible right to deal in commerce with Europeans, which they can only do through the collection and sale of natural products. This requirement is not fulfilled in a satisfactory manner so long as the natives of the Congo are permitted to do so merely "on sufferance."¹ The second condition is that trade between Europeans and Natives shall not be so hampered and restricted as to injure its development. Here again the inherent rights of the native peoples of the Congo, coincide with the legitimate commercial rights of Europeans. There can be no trade without merchants. If the Belgian Government makes impossible conditions for the merchant, commerce cannot hope to gain a permanent footing in the Congo, and the way will be left open, this time through another avenue, for a return to the old *régime*. The salvation of the Congo peoples depends upon the development of commerce.

Obstacles to
Trade
Develop-
ment.

XIII. It is impossible, the Association thinks, to peruse the White Book the Government has now laid before Parliament without feeling that this danger is a very real one, and that the development of trade relations² between the native peoples of the Congo and the outer world is seriously threatened from two sides. First, through the onerous taxes levied upon trade. Secondly, through the further foreshadowed demands upon native labour by the Belgian Government. The first danger is an actual one. The second is a potential one, although clearly indicated. We now crave permission to deal with the first of these dangers.

¹ Apart from the self-evident unsatisfactoriness of the Decree of March, 1910, Consul CAMPBELL'S remark on page 12 of the White Book, where he says that by the end of July traders "can be *more or less certain* that the rubber which they purchase will not be seized," is highly significant.

² The Association regrets the confusion which the words "free trade" give rise to in many minds. If for "free trade" the words "freedom of trade" were substituted in dealing with this matter, the idea so frequently entertained that the problem is any way connected with controversies affecting "free trade" and differential tariffs would be removed.

The Three Articles in which Commercial Transactions are possible.

XIV. The three articles which possess sufficient intrinsic value to pay for export to Europe from the Upper Congo (*i.e.* from four-fifths of the territory) the only articles, therefore, in which commercial transactions are possible at present, and probably for many years to come, are rubber, ivory and gum copal. The Consular Reports add little to our knowledge of the conditions under which the gum copal trade can be carried on. On the other hand, they are replete with voluminous details concerning the conditions of trade in rubber and in ivory.

Handicaps placed upon the Rubber Trade.

XV. With regard to rubber, Consul CAMPBELL, we observe, while admitting that the reduction in taxes is "comparatively generous," allows that even in this revised form they are still "heavy." However, he appears on the whole to regard the changes in the light of "advantages" by comparison with the earlier taxes imposed by the Belgian Administration. He illustrates his conclusion by a comparative table. This table¹ consists (a) of the list of taxes drawn up by Herr VOHSEN published in the *Berliner Tageblatt* and brought to the attention of His Majesty's Government in the Memorial from this Association of November 1909² designed to show what a European merchant acquiring $1\frac{1}{2}$ hectares of land in a rubber-producing district, building thereon a trade *dépôt* and exporting on his own steamer 20 tons of rubber *per annum*, would have to pay to the Belgian Government in fees and taxes; (b) a list of fees and taxes which a European merchant under similar circumstances would have to pay to the Belgian Government under the revised scale. But a comparison of the old and new taxes, as shown in this table, do not appear to bear out the Consul's views as to the latter constituting an advantage over the former. Herr VOHSEN showed that the European merchant would have to pay :—

(1) a lump sum of 5,000 francs; (2) a yearly sum of 32,017.50 francs.

The Consul shows that the European merchant will have to pay :—

(a) an annual lump sum of 250 francs; (b) a yearly sum of 40,357.50 francs.

These totals may be compared thus :—

Old system of handicapping trade :		New system of handicapping trade :	
Lump sum (not recurring) to be paid by merchant		Recurring annual lump sum to be paid by merchant	
..... £200		 £10	
Annual payments by merchant £1,280		Annual payments by merchant .....£1,614	

¹ pp 6 & 7 of the White Book.

² An analysis and criticism of the Belgian Government's proposals.

The
merchant
in a worse
position
than ever.

XVI. The net result, therefore, would seem to be that the European merchant is in a worse position than ever. It would interest the Association very much to know whether His Majesty's Government associate themselves with the Consul in deducing from these figures, that the new arrangement constitutes an "advantage" to the European merchant. The situation works out thus. The European merchant desirous of opening up a trade in rubber in the Congo is called upon to pay to the Belgian Government in fees, licenses, export duties and taxes of various kinds, more than 2 francs per *kilo*. When this is added to the price paid to the native for the article itself (which must, as the Consul rightly points out, rise with competition) and the merchant's own expenses of up-keep, wages, handling and transport in the Congo to port of ocean shipment, freight to Europe, warehouse charges and brokers' fees, etc., at port of discharge, one is almost forced to the conclusion that at the back of the Belgian Government's mind there must be either gross ignorance of local conditions, or a desire not to encourage, but on the contrary to hamper trade. Certainly in no part of Africa outside the Congo Basin is trade handicapped by such preposterous charges, and yet in no part of Africa do circumstances so imperatively demand that international trade should be assisted in every way possible by generous treatment. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the merchant is further handicapped as a rubber exporter by the unfair competition, as an exporter, of the very Government which makes these charges upon his business. We refer to this matter at greater length under the Section headed "State Rubber Plantations."

What are
the Belgian
Govern-
ment's
motives in
hampering
Trade
Develop-
ment?

XVII. The Consuls do not conceal their own suspicion of what the Belgian Government's intentions may be. Attention has already been drawn to some of their utterances in the paragraph dealing with the natives' right to trade at all. But the Consuls are just as emphatic when they refer to the policy of the Belgian Government in hindering Europeans from trading with the natives. In this connection there is a remarkable passage in Consul ARMSTRONG's Report¹ in which he makes the astonishing statement that in the reformed areas Belgian Officials are offering up to 3 francs per *kilo* to the natives for rubber "in order to protect the natives against a possible combination among merchants to keep down the price of rubber." Considering that the Belgian Officials, as the Consul gives ample proof, are *forcing* the natives in the unreformed areas to bring them rubber for a nominal 2½d. a *kilo* (*which actually works out, as the Consul shows, at 6½ ounces of salt for one month's work, and a fathom of cloth value 1s. 4d. for six months' work*), it is not easy to credit the Belgian Government with disinterested zeal for the welfare of the inhabitants of the Congo. But that the Belgian Government should

be buying, or offering to buy, rubber in the reformed areas at all is a surprising revelation, and opens up quite a new vista of future complications. Consul ARMSTRONG goes on to say that while the *Belgian Government is forcing rubber out of the natives at a nominal 2½d. per kilo in the unreformed areas*, the natives in the reformed areas nowhere get less than 2 francs (1s. 8d.) from European merchants. Why, then, is the Belgian Government attempting to make the merchants force up their price? Is it with the idea of assisting the natives? The Belgian Government's action in the unreformed areas provides the best answer to that. Is it, on the other hand, with the idea of making trade impossible, and so provide an excuse for the return to the *status quo ante*, the old system of violence and slavery (still upheld by the Belgian Government in the unreformed area) over the whole territory? Consul ARMSTRONG appears to entertain no doubts on the subject. He recalls the "increased duties on rubber, to which must be added the enormous transport charges," and says that for the Belgian Government to insist upon merchants paying "a minimum price of 3 francs per *kilo* may prove more than the prices in Europe will permit." In other words it may kill the nascent trade which is replacing the old *régime*. The Consul concludes :

"All the evidence, then, points to the fact that the Government intends to make free trade as difficult as possible. And merchants who foresee in this policy a scheme by which the Government seeks to hinder the expansion of private enterprise in the areas opened to free trade in July, 1910, and thus eventually to substitute a monopoly as existed heretofore, cannot be blamed for showing a lack of confidence in Government assurances."

Consul MACKIE reports¹ a conversation with the Vice-Governor General in which the latter expressed his disappointment "that traders had been slow to avail themselves of the trading opportunities offered to them in the districts opened to free trade." The wonder is that any merchants should have had the courage to enter the reformed areas at all under circumstances so utterly discouraging.

Handicaps placed upon the Ivory Trade. XVIII. It is difficult to gather from the Consuls' reports what are the exact conditions prevailing at the moment in the reformed areas with regard to the trade in ivory. Certain passages in some of the reports appear to indicate that the old system of demanding as a "tax," either from the buyers (*i.e.* the merchant) or from the vendor (*i.e.* the native), *one half the quantity of ivory forming the object of the transaction*, remains in force.² Other passages elsewhere suggest that this iniquitous system has been aggravated by a new law virtually prohibiting the export of any ivory at all, except by the Government.³ Merchants, Consul CAMPBELL asserts, are liable to have their ivory "seized at any moment." He instances the case of one firm having

¹ p. 77 of the White Book.

² *Arrêts* of 1889 and 1905.

³ p. 10 of the White Book.

202 points of ivory seized; of another mulcted in 55 points, and so on. Whatever the precise state of the law may be, all the reports agree as to the general position. Consul CAMPBELL declares that the law "practically closes the Congo to ivory traders." Consul ARMSTRONG is equally emphatic, so is Consul THURSTAN.¹

In the unreformed areas the Belgian Government continues to acquire ivory for revenue purposes, partly by force, partly in exchange for guns and ammunition² at fabulous profits, judging from Consul ARMSTRONG's statements, i.e. *a cap gun worth 4/- in Europe and priced at £1. 4s. in the Uelle for 180 to 200 kilograms of ivory worth £180 to £200.*

Trade Development stifled. XIX. Thus the Belgian Government would seem to aim at making trade in the two most important articles of commerce in the Congo a virtual impossibility, except (so far as rubber is concerned) in the Kasai, where the powerful Kasai Company, though not now possessed of a monopoly in law, enjoys a virtual monopoly in practice, based, in part at least, upon the method of paying a powerful native chief, employing armed guards, "a substantial commission per ton on all the rubber collected in his country,"³ "with one object, that of indirectly fostering the rubber production."⁴

C.—The Government Rubber Plantations : Forced Labour for Works of Public Utility: The Native Army.

Are future demands to be made upon Native Labour by the Belgian Government? XX. The *inherent right* of the native peoples of the Congo to trade in the produce of their soil, as that right is affected by the Decree of March, 1910; and the *opportunity afforded to them of so doing*, as affected by the conditions under which European merchants are able to conduct commercial operations in the country; have both been examined. We have seen that in these respects the economic liberty (and consequently the human freedom) of these peoples is not secure under the existing policy of the Belgian Government. The position of the natives—as revealed by the White Book—in that respect, has now to be discussed from the point of view of the Belgian Government's demands upon native labour. It is obvious that if, upon the obstacles already prevalent as regards the free development of trade, there is to be grafted the additional obstacle of incessant demands for labour for "public" purposes (or purposes so represented) the future of the native peoples of the Congo becomes increasingly hazardous. That such danger is to be apprehended cannot—the Association fears—be contested.

¹ p. 38 of the White Book.

² *Vide* Section II., par. VI.

³ Consul THURSTAN p. 45 of the White Book

⁴ *id.* p. 46 of the White Book (Consul THURSTAN, the Association is glad to note, reports a great lessening in the hardships of the natives in connection with the rubber exploitation in the Kasai. But that, of course is not the point specially dealt with in this section of the Memorandum).

Mr. Asquith
and Great
Britain's
"solemn
obligations"
towards the
Native
Peoples of
the Congo.

XXI. Before dealing specifically with the direction whence this danger is to be chiefly dreaded, the Association may be permitted to recall Mr. ASQUITH's utterances at the Guildhall on November 9, 1909, in the relation they bear to the Reports of His Majesty's Consuls in the White Book. Speaking of the Congo Reform movement in this country the Prime Minister said:—

"It is disinterested; it is sincere; it has no ulterior or selfish motive. It is in no sense impertinent, for it has regard to a territory and a population towards which by treaty we have undertaken solemn obligations."

What is the condition to-day of this population towards which Great Britain has "undertaken solemn obligations," as described by the British Consular staff? It is one of great exhaustion following upon twenty years of brutal violence, unrelieved tyranny, barbarous and destructive despotism, which are now seen to have reduced the number of inhabitants of the Congo basin to an extent exceeding the gloomiest speculations of the most fervent upholder of Congo reform.¹ The "solemn obligations," of this country, and of Europe generally, towards the Congo peoples have been singularly inefficacious in preventing those peoples from being decimated in a manner which can hardly be paralleled in history. The remnant is wearied, morose, impoverished. Disease sweeps its ranks. The economic resources of the land have, in many cases, temporarily, at any rate, disappeared.

Consuls'
statements
as to
Exhaustion
and
Impoverish-
ment of the
Country.

XXII. "With the exception," writes Consul CAMPBELL, of the 1910 reformed area, "of a few oases, which are frequent in the Kasai, but rare elsewhere, the 1910 area is practically exhausted (of rubber), and both the forest and the natives will require time to recover from the wholesale exploitation."² "An exhausted country must be given time to recover," he says elsewhere.³ "Forest rubber is fast disappearing"—writes Consul ARMSTRONG of the 1912 unreformed area—"and by the time the Government surrenders its monopoly of this produce there will be none left."⁴ Of that area he remarks further that by July 1912 it will have become "an impoverished country, containing no produce whatever."⁵ Of sundry regions in the Kasai (1910 reformed area) Consul THURSTAN writes that "it is difficult to see how the majority of the natives" will be able to pay their complement of the silver

1 Section II., paragraph V.

2 p. 9 of the White Book.

3 p. 13. of the White Book.

4 p. 20. of the White Book.

5 p. 29. of the White Book.

taxes in future years. In the Maringa region (A.B.I.R.) Consul MACKIE notes the poverty of the natives and the Revs. WELCH, WHITESIDE and SKERRITT ¹ corroborate the Consul's observations. Of Lake Leopold II. District (1911 reformed area) he speaks of the "forced collection" of rubber which went on "for more than three years after it had been admitted that the forest was practically exhausted." Of the Equator District, as a whole, Consul MACKIE remarks that "the country is in a sadly exhausted state."²

XXIII. There is something peculiarly revolting and humiliating to those who agree with Mr. Asquith's definition of the national responsibilities of Great Britain, in the thought that the Belgian Government should be actually at the present moment prosecuting this process of exhaustion with the utmost vigour in any part of the Congo as is the case in the 1912 area; imposing an "ever-increasing rubber tax"; driving the wretched people to the forests for "twenty-one to twenty-five days in each month;" demanding "incessant, ever-increasing and poorly-remunerated labour both for the supply of carriers and of food;" maintaining "in all its detail," a system, "similar to the state of affairs which existed under Congo Free State rule and which was condemned by the whole of the civilised world as slavery."³

The Scheme
of Rubber
Plantations:
The Congo
Reform
Association's
warnings in
November,
1909.

XXIV. But the Association's principal desire at this stage in its analysis of the White Book is not so much to emphasise the disgraceful conditions still existing in the unreformed areas, as to point to the dangers which threaten the entire remaining population of the Congo owing to the future foreshadowed developments of Belgian policy. It seems almost inconceivable that the Belgian Government should contemplate further extensive demands upon native labour. But there are, the Association is reluctantly forced to acknowledge, reasons only too cogent to fear that this may be the case. In the Memorandum submitted to His Majesty's Government by the Association in November 1909, and to which allusion has already been made,⁴ we deplored the announced resolve of the Belgian Government to inaugurate a new system of rubber plantations to be worked on Government account.⁵ We pointed to the contradiction between this announced policy and enlightened European rule in other parts of tropical Africa, which seeks to encourage plantation work by European private enterprise, and by native communal enterprise. We expressed the hope that:

"the Secretary of State will also wish to assure himself that this scheme of Government rubber plantations is not going to give an additional lease of "life to compulsory labour in another direction."

¹ p. 80. of the White Book.

² p. 87. of the White Book.

³ *Vide* Consul Armstrong's Report.

⁴ par. XV.

⁵ pp. 15 and 16 of the *Exposé de motifs*.

We asked how the labour demanded to clear and plant 5,000 acres (the figures contemplated by the Belgian Government) with rubber *per annum*, could possibly be obtained in the Congo without compulsion, when the population "required before everything a period of rest to recuperate." We asked whether the existing laws authorising compulsory labour for works of "public utility" such as the building of railways, would be invoked for the purpose of creating these Government rubber plantations. The Association is not aware whether these representations found any echo in Despatches to the Belgian Government from the Government of His Majesty, or in the course conversations between His Majesty's Minister at Brussels and the Belgian Colonial Minister. Be that as it may, little has been heard of the project in Europe since it was first announced by the Belgian Government.

The testimony of the British Consular Staff. XXV. It transpires, however, from the White Book, that the Belgian Government seems determined to carry out its scheme, thus putting back the hands of the clock of modern conceptions of civilised duties in the African tropics. Consul CAMPBELL gives it as the view of the Authorities that "it is on plantations (of rubber) that the future of the country depends."¹ Elsewhere he speaks of the "considerable" demands for labour which will arise from the "establishment of rubber and other plantations." He adds significantly :

"The future depends to a great extent on private initiative ; and were the Government by generous treatment to encourage companies and traders with a moderate capital who will enrich the country, *instead of exhausting it by the cultivation of rubber and other tropical products . . .*"²

"The Government"—says Consul ARMSTRONG,³ writing of the unopened areas—"hopes to be able to replace the wasted rubber forests with plantations. . . ." "It may, therefore, be concluded that the Government intends to devote its entire attention to rubber—to the exclusion of everything else."

Consul CAMPBELL recalls that the forced labour Decree of June 1906, was remodelled by that of February, 1910, and that under the latter, natives are still called upon to furnish labour, *under three years' contracts*, for works of "public utility." It is hardly necessary to state that no native of Africa will voluntarily contract for a three years' term of service. There seems to be no obstacle to this Decree being made to apply to Government rubber plantations since they are to be instituted for the purpose of raising revenue.

¹ p. 9 of the White Book.

² p. 13 of the White Book.

³ p. 20 of the White Book.

XXVI. Thus a situation is plainly foreshadowed, when, coupled on the one hand with insecurity as to his inherent right of earning wealth and bettering his position by collecting and trading in the soil's products, and on the other hand, with handicaps upon commercial intercourse between Europeans and Natives, so onerous as to make the progressive development of trade highly questionable; the native of the Congo, exhausted by long years of grinding oppression, is threatened with renewed calls upon his labour for a Government which, meantime, imposes upon him a tax in silver coin exceeding in the ratio of its incidence, taxes of a similar character levied in other tropical regions of Africa, happily spared the destructive processes of Congo Free State and Belgian rule.

The Native Army.

XXVII. The last point the Association desires to bring to the notice of His Majesty's Government refers to the native army. It might have been supposed that the abrogation in a considerable part of the Congo of the system of exploitation and slavery, hitherto prevailing (a system requiring the constant use of military force) would have led to a considerable reduction in the native army. This reduction has not taken place, and in the unreformed regions the employment of armed ruffians, in addition to the regular troops, is vouched for by Consul ARMSTRONG. Consul MACKIE believes, indeed, that there is "every likelihood that the strength of the actual standing army will be reduced."¹ This belief is not borne out by the facts. The last official returns show the Belgian native army on the Congo to number 17,833 native ranks, and the contingent to be recruited this year was given at 3,375 men—whether an addition by that number to the above total, or replacing time-expired units, the Association is not informed. How disproportionate in numbers is this force, compared with area and population, to the military forces maintained by other Powers in the African tropics, the following Table will show:

	Area in sq. miles.	Population.	Military (native ranks).
British dependencies in Tropical Africa ²	928,535	26,026,790	9,489
German ditto ³	574,209 ⁵	12,000,000 ⁵	3,828
French ditto ⁴	2,255,090 ⁵	13,867,000 ⁵	12,416
The Congo under Belgian rule	900,000	7,250,000	17,833

¹ p 88 White Book.

² Nyassaland, Uganda, British East Africa, Northern Nigeria, Southern Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Gambia.

³ Cameroons and German East Africa.

⁴ French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa.

⁵ The mileage and population here given do not take into account recent territorial changes, which increase both in the case of Germany, and decrease both, in the case of France, proportionately. *Vide* Sec. II. par. V.

What is the
explanation?

XXVIII. While Great Britain requires under 10,000 native troops to keep order in a total area but very slightly larger than the Congo, inhabited by 26 million natives, many of them warlike and Mahomedans, Belgium requires nearly 18,000 Native troops to control a broken, impoverished, discouraged, Pagan population of $7\frac{1}{4}$ millions! Germany can manage nearly 14 million natives with 12,416 men, but Belgium requires 17,833 for a population half the size.

XXIX. What is the explanation of so formidable a force? To this question the Association does not profess to suggest a reply. But, taken in conjunction with the traffic in arms so actively carried on by the Belgian Government,¹ precisely in one of the two portions of the Congo where more or less homogeneous native entities still survive, it is obvious that a situation is created replete with danger for the stability of European rule in the equatorial regions of the Dark Continent.

* * * * *

Belgian
Obligations
and
Britain's
Duty.

The cumulative effect of this consideration of facts relating to the future outlook of the Congo under Belgian rule, cannot, the Association believes, be impartially considered without grave anxiety. The Association is persuaded of the existence in Belgium of elements animated with the best of intentions. It has frequently rendered homage to the courageous, untiring, unceasing efforts of the distinguished Belgian statesman, M. EMILE VANDERVELDE, to improve the situation since annexation and to guide public opinion aright : and in many directions these efforts have succeeded in preventing reactionary measures and in checking abuses. But M. VANDERVELDE does not, unfortunately for the Congo, possess executive responsibility. On the other hand, the actions of the Belgian Government, and especially of the Belgian Colonial Minister, have not been such as to inspire confidence. By its policy the present Belgian Government is infringing International Treaty rights ; disregarding the teaching of history, and falling short of the most essential requirements of civilised rule in tropical Africa.

XXX. The Association submits that the "solemn obligations" of the British Government and people towards the native races of the Congo, proclaimed by Mr. ASQUITH, by leading statesmen of both Parties, by the House of Commons and by the religious leaders of the nation, are not fulfilled merely by refusing to grant

the official recognition of this country to Belgian rule in Africa, while a state of affairs such as that disclosed by the White Book prevails three years after the transfer of the Congo State to Belgium. Belgium, the Association holds, is rich enough to sweep away all existing abuses, and able, by legislative enactments, to place the future of the long persecuted Congo peoples upon a footing of permanent security. The Association contends that if the words of the Prime Minister of Great Britain possess any real significance, it is the manifest duty of His Majesty's Government to insist upon the Belgian Government carrying out its Treaty obligations without further delay.

For the CONGO REFORM ASSOCIATION,

E. D. MOREL,

Honorary Secretary.



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